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Subdeacon Nektarios, M.A. 🏰 Feb 20, 2023 14 min read

## Ecumenism & Sergianism: Did the Moscow Patriarchate Renounce Them?

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**By Subdeacon Nektarios, M.A.**

Since the interference of the Ecumenical Patriarchate into the life of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) in 2018, all eyes have been focused on the Greek and Russian Churches. The Orthodox world has witnessed the large migration of Orthodox Christians out of the Greek Orthodox Churches and into the Russian Orthodox Church, where the Moscow Patriarchate is seen as a bastion of traditional Orthodoxy; where traditionalism is king and compromise to the heresies of the world are non-existent. At least it is thus assumed. Orthodox Russia is looked at by many as the third Rome where, again, traditional Orthodoxy will be defended. Many Orthodox Christians see that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and other Greek Churches are engaged in unbridled ecumenism, praying with heretics in open violations of the canons, openly becoming involved in leftist-statist political movements, and overall barreling full speed ahead into ecumenistic apostasy.



Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew & Patriarch Kirill of Moscow

Many Orthodox Christians have been extremely critical of the Greek Churches because of the full display of apostasy that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America have embraced and have turned to Russia as the solution. However, we must ask ourselves, is the Moscow Patriarchate everything people think it is? Have they resisted these same heresies that the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Greek Archdiocese have so openly embraced? We have to ask ourselves has the Moscow Patriarchate explicitly renounced the heresies of Ecumenism and Sergianism which they were red-handedly guilty of during the Soviet period?

First, we must briefly examine what these heresies are. Sergianism is an ecclesiological heresy that originated in the 20th century when the Patriarch of Moscow, Sergius (Stragorodsky), stated in the 1927 Synodal Decree concerning the Church's relation to the Godless Atheist Soviet Government that the joys of the Soviet state are the Church's joys and the State's sorrows, the Church's sorrows. Sergius in his declaration, continues, saying that: "To those people who do not want to understand the 'signs of the times' it may seem that it is impossible to break with the old regime, and even with the monarchy, without breaking with Orthodoxy [...] we can either obey the legitimate authority [...] or withdraw from society. None but armchair dreamers can think that such a vast institution as our Orthodox Church with its entire structure organization can exist peacefully in a country while walling itself off from the authorities" [1]. This statement in light of our Christian history in the ancient Roman Catacombs and the Martyrdom of the family of the Tsar is itself unconscionable.

Sergianism is then a bowing of the hierarchs to the forerunners of the Anti-Christ [the Soviet Regime] and declaring obedience to them and to their agendas, which history has shown us includes the persecution of the Orthodox Church and the murder of its saints. The primary characteristics of Sergianism are:

1. Viewing the Church administration first and foremost as an organization which must be blindly obeyed (despite its hierarchs teaching bareheaded heresy) as if the voice of the organization was always and without exception the voice of Christ (think of when the Church was ruled by the Arian faction, Patriarch Nestorius and the Iconoclasts).
2. Failing to distinguish between the God-given authority of Caesar and the God-allowed "authority" of the Antichrist which is rooted in Satan (Apocalypse 13:2).
3. Lying, doing evil, persecuting the Saints and overturning tradition to supposedly save the Church from evil.
4. An idolization of "canonicity" and using this to quench the Spirit. Along with this, Sergianism replaces genuine spiritual life with dead canonical forms; while failing to distinguish how the Church must act during normal times versus times of persecution.
5. Gazing upon the "Mystery of Iniquity" and proclaiming Soviet "joys and successes are our joys and successes and whose failures, [our] failures" [2]. Thus the mission of the Church is perverted and replaced by something else (whether openly evil or seemingly good) and effectively a new master is proclaimed as the acting head of the Church (instead of Christ).
6. Sinning against the dogma of the Church by perverting her nature; this is done by identifying the Church with Caesar or with the Anti-Christ, instead of with Christ himself. This attempts to turn the Church from being the house of salvation into a political or social organization.
7. Betraying Christ and trampling upon the truth for the sake of obtaining or maintaining a legally functioning Church organization. Sergianism attempts to kill and suppress the organism for the sake of the organization.
8. Denying the spirit of Martyrdom and Confession of the Faith and making, before the world, a spectacle of the Church by presenting the Church (the Body of Christ) as if it were a pathetic slave without freedom and dignity.
9. And finally, the Chiliastic (belief advanced by some religious denominations that a Paradise will occur on Earth prior to the final judgment) spirit which aims to transform the existing social and political order through the establishment of Christian ideals in order to form a moral or religious governmental New World Order or a Kingdom of God on Earth.

Sergianism, in short is an idolatry, heresy, ecclesiastical renovation, schismatic design and apostasy from true Orthodox ecclesiology and ultimately Orthodox Christian doctrine. It is a system of cowardice, non-resistance to evil, a criminalization of confessing the Orthodox faith and a denial of God's providence and a scorning of the Neptic tradition of the Saints. The Blessed First-Hierarch and founder of the Russian Church Abroad Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) says of Patriarch Sergius that he:

Did not maintain the necessary dignity of the Church; he bound it to the godless State with such a bond as has deprived it of internal freedom, and at the same time deviated from the righteousness whose upholder the First Hierarch of the Church of Russia has to be. In his Declaration, Metropolitan Sergius on the one hand justified the Soviet regime for its many crimes against the Church and religion in general, and on the other hand, contrary to obvious truth, he accused many of the worthy Russian hierarchs and pastors who had become confessors of the truth of Orthodoxy of counter-revolutionary tendencies, and tarnished the halo of martyrdom of the whole Church of Russia, which is recognized by the entire Christian world [3].

On the other side of the heretical coin is that of Ecumenism which like its brother, Sergianism, is another ecclesiological heresy. This heresy teaches "that Christ's Church is divided into so-called 'branches' which differ in doctrine and way of life, or that the Church does not exist visibly, but will be formed in the future when all 'branches' or sects or denominations, and even religions will be united into one body" [4] and which proclaims that sacraments of heretics exist outside of the Orthodox Church and that these so-called mysteries of heretics are "effectual for salvation" [5].

Now that these two heresies and their definitions have been made clear we can research the question; Has the Moscow Patriarchate ever renounced these heresies? To begin with the matter of Sergianism we can look to the words of Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow in 2001 in which he states:

As regards the accusations of the so-called Sergianism, I would like to say that one has to live here, in the homeland, to understand that it is an artificial accusation and an artificial pretext whipped up only to prevent reunification. Reference is made mostly to the message of Metropolitan Sergiy (Stragorodsky) of 1927, the so-called Declaration of Metropolitan Sergiy. By this message he wanted to show to the authorities, which, I will remind you, put clergy and faithful to prisons and shoot them to death, that the Church was not a counter-revolutionary organization. Therefore, the message stated: "...we want to be Orthodox and want to be aware of the Soviet Union as our Motherland whose joys are our joy and whose sorrows are our sorrows". More often than not, it is these words that arouse far-fetched criticism: "What joys can one have in common with a[n] atheistic state?" But there was no point about an atheistic state, the point was the Motherland, though in 1927 this notion was almost forgotten.

It was a courageous step by which Metropolitan Sergiy tried to save the Church and the clergy. By stating that the church members wanted to be aware of themselves as part of their Motherland and wanted to share her joys and sorrows, he tried to show to those who persecuted the Church, who destroyed it, that we, children of the Church, want to be loyal citizens, so that one's belonging to the Church might not put one outside the law. So it is a far-fetched accusation. As far as the accusation of ecumenism is concerned, I will say that today no Church, including the Russian Church Abroad, can withdraw to isolation. We live in this world and should and will relate to people of other confessions and faiths. Especially today when global terrorism is spreading, all need to unite efforts against the evil.

I would like to stress that participating in the work of international Christian organizations, the Russian Orthodox Church has always witnessed to Holy Orthodoxy. Her presence helped representatives of western confessions to understand the Orthodox position. No one of those who participated in the work of international Christian organizations has ever departed from their faith by a jot. We have always borne witness to Orthodoxy, to our belonging to the Holy Orthodox Church [6].

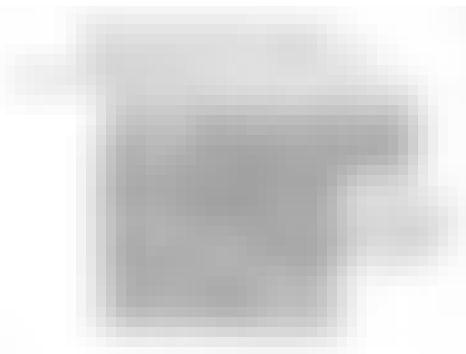
The position of the Moscow Patriarchate, concerning Patriarch Sergius and his 1927 declaration has unfortunately, never been officially renounced as heretical, problematic, or even at a minimum worthy of public repentance. In 2017, Patriarch Kirill the current Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church had even dedicated a statue to the former 20th century Patriarch Sergius, in which during his address at the dedication of this speech states:

Probably, many of you know that His Holiness Sergius carried out his labors in the most difficult time in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church. As the Primate of the Church, he faced such difficulties that no one else faced, because it was about the very existence of the Orthodox faith in Rus'. His Holiness Sergius worthily passed his way of the cross as a Patriarch. And therefore, we, grateful descendants, remembering the anniversary date from the day of his birth, turn to God with a prayer that He may rest the soul of His Holiness Patriarch Sergius in His heavenly abodes and preserve the eternal grateful memory of him in our hearts. I heartily congratulate you on this wonderful holiday and on the opening in the center of Arzamas, the hometown of His Holiness the Patriarch, a monument testifying to the recognition of his works by our contemporaries [7].

On that same day at the Holy Monastery of the Transfiguration near Arzamas, the governor of the Nizhny Novgorod region says of Patriarch Sergius that, "Patriarch Sergius absorbed all the best that was on this earth, and became a true saint of our land, the guardian of the Orthodox faith and a great patriot" [8]. As we can see from a purely historical perspective, the Moscow Patriarchate has not condemned Sergianism or the actions of Patriarch Sergius, but has done the opposite and denied the existence of Sergianism and has honored his memory with the dedication of a memorial statue in his name in Russia and with the praise of the local Russian Government.

The next question to be examined is that of the heresy of Ecumenism. Has the Moscow Patriarchate ever renounced the heresy of Ecumenism as the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCOR) has done in 1983? To answer this question, we can first look to the list of member "churches" at the World Council of Churches which list the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) as a member since 1961. [9] Furthermore, we can look into the activities of the Moscow Patriarchate who has been a major participant in the Ecumenical Movement since the 1960's.

Based on these historical activities from the Moscow Patriarchate it is clear they have never renounced their participation in the heretical ecumenist movement nor have they ceased to participate in ecumenical gatherings, to include joint prayer with heretics in violation of Church Canons. To be fair the Moscow Patriarchate has denounced the Branch Theory in the document On the Attitude of the Orthodox Church Towards the Heterodox and Towards Inter-Confessional Organizations. In 1969 the Moscow Patriarchate, in a synodal decision, signed a declaration in which it *de facto* came into eucharistic communion with the Latin Confession, whereby allowing Papists to receive Orthodox mysteries from Russian Orthodox priests [10]. However, in December of 1987, the Synod of the Moscow Patriarchate, decided to postpone [not eliminate] this decision. Although this decision was postponed in the late 1980's, the Ecumenist recognition of Papal sacraments has never been reversed, condemned, or repented of.



New York Times News Article on MP & Latin Eucharistic Communion

Roman Catholic Church" [11].



Patriarch Kirill of Moscow Dedicating a Statue of Patriarch Sergius (2017).

Another example of the Moscow Patriarchate participating in ecumenism can be seen in a 2009 statement from Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev), the official spokesman for the Russian Orthodox Church Department of External relations, who stated in an interview with the "Church and the World" television show on Russian Television, "to all intent and purposes, mutual recognition of each other's Mysteries already exists between us. We do not have communion in the Mysteries, but we do recognize each other's Mysteries, [...] If a Roman Catholic priest converts to Orthodoxy, we receive him as a priest, and we do not re-ordain him. And that means that, de facto, we recognize the Mysteries of the Roman Catholic Church" [10]. In another interview, Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) again says, "If a Roman Catholic priest converts to Orthodoxy, we receive him as a priest, and we do not re-ordain him. And that means that, de facto, we recognize the Mysteries of the

In another statement from Metropolitan Hilarion (Alfeyev) concerning a response to the question: "Do representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate participate in joint prayers during their meetings with the non-orthodox?" He states:

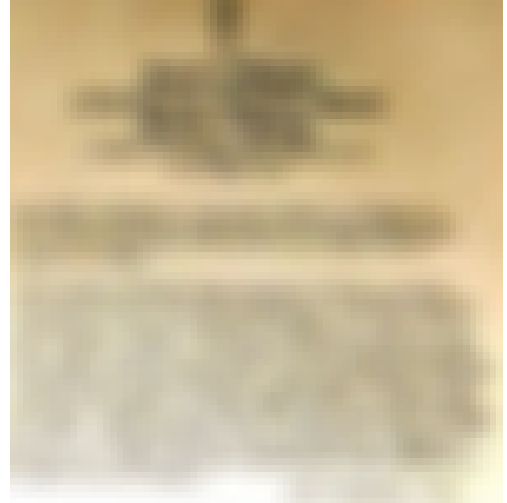
As far as 'prayer with heretics' is concerned, there are ancient canons which no one ever repealed. But in interpreting these laws, I feel we should attentively study the context in which they were appeared. Who were these 'heretics' referred to in these rules? Arians who rejected the Divinity of Jesus Christ, the 'Pneumatomachs' who rejected the Divinity of the Holy Spirit, the 'Eutichians,' who rejected the human nature of Christ, etc. Neither the Catholics nor the Protestants reject the Holy Trinity, do not reject the Divinity of Christ or His human nature. That is why we cannot equate them with the heretics referred to in the canons of the Ancient Church [...] when canon law speaks of the inadmissibility of prayer with heretics, it refers, in my opinion, to prayer of a liturgical character, not to 'common' prayer. When you invite a non-orthodox Christian to your home, could you not together with him, read the Lord's Prayer before the meal? Or at inter-Christian conferences—could we not, before a meeting begins, read 'O Heavenly King?' Or, as an Orthodox Christian, when entering a non-orthodox temple, even during a service, could you not raise a prayer to God? One can pray in the forest, one can pray in a bus (filled, maybe, with atheists or those of other religions), but one cannot pray in a Christian church, even if it is not Orthodox? Honestly, I do not see the logic in that [12].

As we can see from official statements, actions, and other historical documentation, the Moscow Patriarchate has not officially or in practice condemned either the heresy of Ecumenism or Sergianism but has continued in the practice of one [Ecumenism] and ignored the historical reality of the other [Sergianism]. Whereas the Russian Church Abroad [ROCOR] in a letter to the Moscow Patriarchate recognizes Sergianism as a reality by stating:

The division between you and us is dismissed as political by many. However, in the revolutionary events in Russia that are to blame for the beginning of our division, we see nothing political in the proper sense of the word. The motivating factors of those bloody events were lies, deception, apostasy and theomachism. You must agree that this gives us the right to evaluate the sovietization of Russia as a moral and profoundly religious catastrophe. Metropolitan Sergius' declaration of 1927 expanded this catastrophe to the internal life of the Church, laying the foundation for the phenomenon we call Sergianism. This Sergianism was manifested especially in the cooperation of church hierarchs with the KGB [13].

The last question that we have to ask ourselves is what does that mean for those Orthodox Christians who are within the structure of the Moscow Patriarchate and who are now aware of these problematic historical realities and facts? Is the answer to declare the Moscow Patriarchate a graceless structure and join one of the Russian synods in resistance? That question I cannot answer for you.

In September of 1974 the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad published a synodal letter in which ROCOR stated in reference to the new calendarist innovation and the question of gracelessness that, "a final decision, [...] can be made only by a properly convoked, competent Ecumenical Council" [14]. That being said the issue revolving around the new calendar is not the same issue surrounding the canonical status of the Moscow Patriarchate and the union that came about in 2007 between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. What must be done by each individual concerning the answers to this ultimate question is to research it for yourself and to discover the truth. However, I will end with this. Metropolitan Philaret of New York, the incorrupt First-Hierarch and New Confessor for the Faith, who often referred to the Moscow Patriarchate as the "soviet false church" says in one homily recently translated into English says:



But here's what I wanted to draw your attention to, something that many people don't think about at all. Father Archimandrite Konstantin, probably many of you know him, the late editor of the magazine *Orthodox Rus*, is a deep, Christian mind, he considered the most terrible of all the communists' "achievements" that communism created its own false church, the Soviet one, which they suggested to the unfortunate people instead of the real Church, that went into the catacombs, disappeared from the surface. Do not think that I am exaggerating, or that Father Konstantin exaggerated. Once there was an All-Russian Church Council, in 1918. At this Council, the entire All-Russian Church, headed by its Primate Patriarch Tikhon, anathematized (excommunicated from the Church) both the enemies of God themselves and all those who would cooperate with them [15].

Each one of us is responsible of taking hold of their own Orthodoxy, learning its history, dogmas, and upholding its traditions and living it out faithfully so that when heresy presents itself we are able to recognize it and to not remain silent! As Saint Theodore the Studite says, "It is a commandment of the Lord that we should not be silent when the faith is in peril. So, when it is a matter of the Faith, one cannot say, 'Who am I? A priest, a ruler, a soldier, a farmer, a poor man? I have no say or concern in this matter.' Alas! The stones shall cry out, and you remain silent and unconcerned?"

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